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JOURNAL OF THE MISSISSIPPI BAPTIST CONVENTION

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Bengali Hindus: Searching for deliverer

CALCUTTA, India (BP) — William Carey and Mother Teresa lived in very different eras. What they shared — what brought them both to India — was a deep burden of love for the Bengali people, among whom they lived and died.

Carey, the "father of modern missions," lifted the light of God's love in countless ways among the Bengalis: evangelism, Bible translation, education, social service, defending the oppressed.

Mother Teresa, probably the late 20th century's most famous missionary, rescued the sick, orphaned, and dying from the streets of Calcutta.

Many Bengalis received their love and returned it, but despite their heroic legacies and the labors of many others, the light of Christ remains a fragile candle among today's Bengali Hindus.

The Indian state of West Bengal is home to most of the 68 million Bengali Hindus in India (another 11 million live next-door in predominately Muslim Bangladesh). They comprise one of the world's largest ethnolinguistic people groups.

Yet fewer than 400,000 professing Christians live among them. Born-again evangelical believers may number as few as 10,000. Reaching all of Hindu Bengal with the Gospel seems an impossible task.

For centuries, Bengali Hindus have placed their hope of deliverance, protection, and wealth in their many gods and goddesses — especially Kali, fearsome goddess of power and destruction.

Her 300-year-old temple looms in the heart of sprawling Calcutta (the city itself is named for her), which in turn is the heart of the Hindu Bengali world.

In the passageways riddling the temple complex, pilgrims mingle with beggars, sleeping homeless, families on holiday, priests, tourists, and merchants. It's a microcosm of Calcutta itself, a crumbling giant dominated by a bewildering, exhausting, energizing, terrifying blend of darkness and light, hunger and abundance, filth and luxury, violence and kindness, chaos and a distinctly Bengali kind of order.

For all its poverty and misery, Calcutta still calls itself the "City of Joy." The metropolis of more than 11 million souls is nearly always celebrating one festival or another which all



IDOL WORSHIP — On a Calcutta side street, an apprentice fashions a plaster-and-straw statue for Divali, the Hindu festival of lights. It's a year-round occupation for workers in the neighborhood. (BP photo)

end at the banks of the river Hugli, branch of holy Ganges, where goddess idols, flowers, and the bodies of departed loved ones all float out to their final resting place.

Two centuries after Carey began his ground breaking missionary work in Bengal, "official" Christianity totals less than .5% of the population.

Church growth, says an observer, is "marred by divisions within the believers and a non-evangelical atmosphere that has thwarted evangelism."

Poor missions methodology and Western paternalism also have contributed to building a Christian "ghetto" through the decades, along with periodic hostility from state and national governments, religious persecution, and the strong cultural identity of Bengali Hindus.

The Christian movement began promisingly among tribal peoples, untouchables, and low-caste groups but never expanded to reach the great masses of Hindus in middle and upper castes.

Family opposition, negative social or economic consequences, Hinduism's radical different worldview, and many other factors also work to prevent any Indian Hindu from embracing Christ.

Tentative signs indicate things might be changing:

• The 11 million Bengali Hindus of neighboring

- Works of power — healings, miracles — are occurring with increasing frequency in some villages where the Gospel is spreading, says a Bengali Baptist leader.

• Younger Christians are showing greater boldness and love in sharing Christ with others. Younger Hindus are embracing him — and passing the light on to others.

"I want to be the light in their lives," says one new believer in Calcutta, "but I'm asking God to prepare me to be the light. I don't want to be like Christians who reach a certain point, then step down. I'm ready to sacrifice each and every thing for the cross, whatever it takes."

A Nobel Prize-winning Bengali Hindu poet wrote hopefully to a "new deliverer": "Today we search for your unwritten name. You seem to be just off the stage, Like an imminent star of morning."

The ancient Hindu epic Bhagavad Gita speaks of a personal relationship with one god, Bhagavan, the very personification of compassion and justice.

"Nevertheless, this Bhagavan has never been worshipped, nor has he even been an object of regular prayer," observes a scholar of Hinduism. "To the Hindus this Unknown God was fully known, but never worshipped."

Are the Bengali Hindus worth it? William Carey thought so. So did Mother Teresa.

"We think so, too," a Christian worker said.



RIVER WORSHIP — For all its poverty and misery, Calcutta still calls itself the "City of Joy." Its many festivals end at the river Hugli, branch of the holy Ganges, where goddess idols, flowers, and the bodies of departed loved ones all float out to their final resting place. (BP photo)

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the
**Unfinished
Task**
2000

Dispelling the Darkness
Pavlin 67

**Week of Prayer for
International Missions
and
International Mission Study
December 3-10, 2000**

Lottie Moon Christmas Offering
Offering goal: \$115 million

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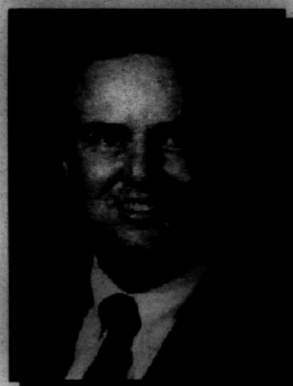
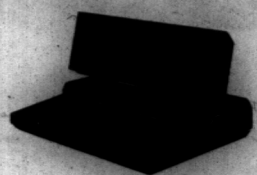
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The legacy of the Heavenly Book Visitor

Charlotte Diggs Moon was born into the rarified Virginia aristocracy at her family's Albermarle estate on Dec. 17, 1840. She died a pauper's death 72 years later, thousands of miles from home and a lifetime away from her privileged early life.

Those are the cold, textbook facts. We all have a beginning and an ending on this earth, but it's what we do in between that counts for eternity.

"Lottie," as she came to be called, eventually understood that fact.

Although she was raised with cultural and educational advantages far above the standards of the day, Lottie Moon was a disaffected student and scornful of religion.

A bright young woman given to mischief and pranks, it appeared she was headed for a life of casual dissipation.

All that changed in 1858, however, when God moved in her life and she accepted Christ as Lord and Savior while attending First Church, Charlottesville, Va.

God moved again in her life in 1873, when she requested and against all odds received her missionary appointment from the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board (FMB) — one of the first single women chosen for Southern Baptist missionary service.

Lottie set sail for China in September of that year and by December had settled in the northern town of Tengchow, where she lived for the next 40 years.

She devoted herself to evangelistic work among the women and children of the surrounding area, telling all who would listen about the "true God," giving away books, and teaching those who couldn't read.

Lottie was rejected many times and earned the nickname of "Devil Old Woman," but her persistence never faded.

She wrote to her friends in the United States, "I wish I had a thousand lives to that I might give them to the women of China!"

Lottie's love for the Bible and for the Chinese people became legendary in the

villages around Tengchow, and opposition to her work eventually faded.

Then one day as she moved among the people with Bible in hand, she heard someone refer to her as, "The Heavenly Book Visitor." The name stuck with the villagers.

In Lottie's day, China suffered almost constant internal political and military turmoil, with outside powers also attempting to exert their influence.

Still, Lottie fervently continued her work.

Civil strife at one point prompted the American consul to gather U.S. citizens to the city of Chefoo for protection, but Lottie refused to leave her beloved people in Tengchow.

The Russo-Japanese War of 1904-05, fought over control of the Chinese province of Manchuria and other parts of the China, ignited a famine that soon spread through the countryside and foreshadowed fateful events to come in Lottie's life.

Lottie begged the FMB for money to buy food for the starving Chinese, but the board was in debt and had no money to send.

Desperate to help the people around whom God had called her to build her life and ministry, Lottie withdrew her personal savings and used it to feed the hungry.

When that money ran out, she used virtually all her meager salary to buy food for others — often failing to retain enough for herself. She collapsed five days before her seventy-second birthday, her health broken and her frail, 4'10" frame nearly decimated. Years of personal sacrifice had taken its toll.

Lottie died of starvation on Christmas Eve 1912, in the harbor of Kobe, Japan, on a

"THAT'S A CHURCH
BUSINESS MEETING CALLED
TO DECIDE ON THE FATE
OF UNBELIEVERS!"



ship that was taking her to America. Her body was cremated according to Japanese law and the ashes were returned to Virginia.

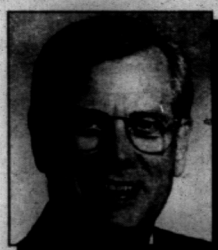
A marble gravestone in a small Virginia cemetery carries Lottie's name, as does the greatest foreign mission offering in Christendom.

On that gravestone is this simple phrase: "Faithful unto death."

God permit that those words, bought at so great a price by the Heavenly Book Visitor, should also mark our own Christian service.

Reprinted annually in connection with the Season of Prayer for International Missions and the Lottie Moon Offering for International Missions emphasis.

GUEST OPINION:



Darkness turns to dawning

By Jerry Rankin, president
International Mission Board

Generations of missionaries and Christian witnesses have continued to proclaim the Light of the world. Yet 2,000 years after the Light arrived, the darkness remains.

Across an evangelized Africa, pockets of darkness remain where fetishes and witch doctors hold people in bondage to ancient fears and superstitions.

Pervasive darkness

overwhelms Latin America as empty religious ritual succumbs to the syncretism of spiritists casting demonic spells.

Continuing devotion to millions of Hindu deities, the garlanded Buddhis t images in Asia, and ancestral altars in Chinese homes attests to darkness still waiting for the light to dawn.

Delusions of self-sufficiency have swept Europe into the

darkness of secular humanism. And the ultimate embodiment of darkness still captures the minds of millions as 20th century communism, with its atheistic ideology, denies that the Light even exists.

How can the darkness be dispelled? The answer is found in a hymn not often sung these days, "We've a Story to Tell." That's it! A simple story, the story of the Gospel, a story of truth and mercy, a story of peace and light!

Within the message of that story is the power to dispel the darkness, and because that story is being told, the darkness shall turn to dawning, and the dawning to noonday bright.

The darkness is turning to dawning among unreached people groups who are hearing the gospel for the first time. The darkness of communism cannot repel the power of the Light as Jesus is lifted up among the peoples of China and Eastern Europe.

God is calling us to dispel the darkness. That is the reason he has allowed the light to shine in our hearts, so that we will pray, we will give, and we will go.



Refugees living in need of Gospel message

LONDON (BP) — Black darkness reigned in the back of the 18-wheeler. Hidden for four days behind boxes, they rode through Europe and across the English Channel, eating and drinking very little, since there were no toilets.

They are the most recent refugees seeking political and economic asylum in London. They join thousands of others from Albania, Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran, Pakistan, India, Turkey, Cyprus, Yemen, Somalia — members of 92 different ethnic peoples from The Last Frontier, nations where most of earth's unreached peoples live.

Life in London is not what most refugees hoped. They are surprised to find themselves in slums or government housing, competing with refugees from 50-60 other nations for jobs.

Society sees them as an economic and social blight. Gangs, prostitutes, and drugs confront them in the dark, cold city.

The light of God is there too, in Barnabas and Lydia Guidry (not their real names), Southern Baptists who long for the refugees to meet Jesus.

Barnabas and Lydia have long wanted to work with people overseas. As new Christians

they related to internationals in the U.S.

Early in marriage they simplified their lifestyle to serve God in the Philippines, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan. Now they share Christ in London with people from countries with little or no access to the Gospel.

a relationship, and asked other followers to pray for Sum.

"Finally one day, in tears, Sum admitted her sin and asked Jesus to forgive her, giving her life to Jesus," recalls Barnabas. "The believers did not stop praying for her, however, because Satan began to make her life very difficult."

Her husband began beating her.

"In spite of this, Sum is now, after six years, studying in a small Bible school for people involved in multiethnic ministry," Barnabas reports. "She has a burden to reach other Hindus with the gospel and is now cooperating with several other Hindu men and women who are leaders in the small believing community."

Isa (not his real name) is a salesman for a multinational office machines company. He looks the part: sharply dressed, erect, confident.

He has a quick wit and knows how to put people at ease.

Isa began working in London as a policeman, a

"Bobby." A drinking problem, however, affected his work and his marriage.

Several strong followers of Jesus began to mentor this Muslim. He took a new job and over the years came to faith in Christ.

Isa experienced "a miraculous freedom in the Lord from the struggles and bondage of his past," Barnabas says.

Seven years later, through

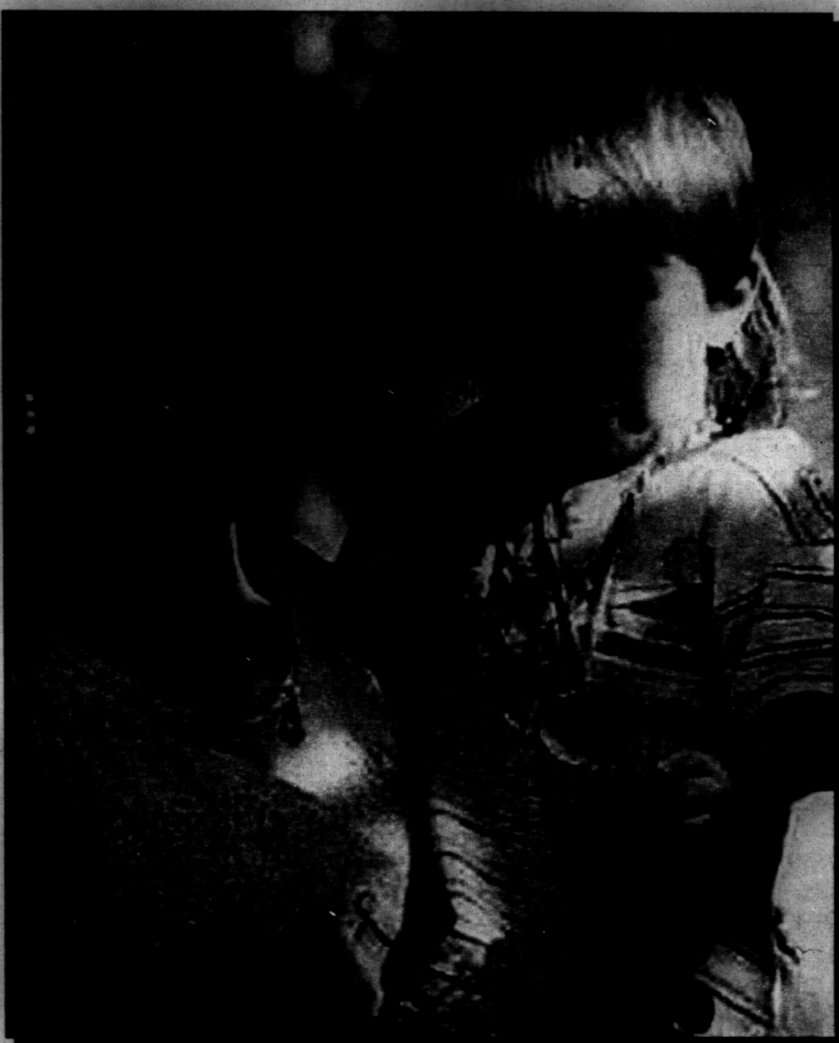
Isa's gentle sharing and believers' earnest prayers, his wife followed Jesus.

"Prayer got this couple and their three children through five more years of rejection and persecution by family members, the loss of their home, financial difficulty, and the death of their parents," Barnabas testifies.

"They currently are leading a house group Bible study for members of their own people group in London," he says.

The Guidrys provide classes for Christians in cross-cultural communication and outreach. Workshops for immigrants help parents and their children handle cultural conflicts.

Additionally, providing help with English skills, housing problems, government forms, doctors' visits, and sewing all serve to radiate Christ's light.



ACROSS ALL NATIONS — Refugees from 92 different ethnic peoples of The Last Frontier seek political and economic asylum in London. They come from nations where most of earth's unreached peoples live, places like Albania, Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran, Pakistan, India, Turkey, Cyprus, Yemen, Somalia. Southern Baptists are there too, sharing God's light with people who live in darkness. (BP photo)

Sum, a small woman with a long braid and flowing "sari," grew up in India. Her arranged marriage to a British immigrant brought her to London.

Several years ago, a follower of Jesus visited her, established

Prof: Rice laid groundwork

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (BP) — Denominations such as the Southern Baptist Convention and missions agencies such as the International Mission Board owe much of their existence to the groundwork laid more than 150 years ago by Baptist pioneer Luther Rice, Southern Seminary professor Mark Terry said in an annual faculty address in October. Terry, the seminary's A.P. and Faye Stone Professor of Christian Missions and Evangelism, said Rice's contributions to Baptist beliefs are sometimes overshadowed by those of other pioneers, including Adoniram Judson. Terry noted that Rice, who lived from 1783 to 1836, played a significant role in the history of Baptists in America. "He led in the transformation of widely scattered, disorganized churches into a true denomination," Terry said. "He envisioned and initiated programs of foreign missions, home missions, Christian education, and publications which enrich Baptist life and witness today. The records show that Baptists were interested in missions before Rice returned from India, but he was a kind of catalyst for Baptists." It was in India where Rice and Judson began their service on the mission field in 1812. Once in India, the two men changed their beliefs on the ordinance of baptism — leading to a split with a group of Congregationalists who had backed the trip. Facing a lack of unified effort to help missionaries, Rice's request for financial help changed. Terry said Rice also planted the seeds for what became the Southern Baptist Missionary Union. As he traveled he organized missionary societies.



THE
SECOND
FRONT PAGE

Record

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Looking back

10 years ago

The missions needs of 1990 are just crucial as the missions needs in the days of Lottie Moon, Southern Baptists' first single female missionary in 1873, according to Keith Parks, president of the Foreign Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention.

20 years ago

Southern Baptists breathe a sigh of relief when the U.S. Congress finally reinstates a tax exclusion for foreign missionaries and other overseas charitable workers. Without the exclusion, the Foreign Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention would have had to pay over \$1,000,000 per year.

50 years ago

All Cooperative Program dollars received in the offices of the Executive Committee of the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) in Nashville during the upcoming month of December will go to advance foreign missions, announces Duke K. McCall, executive secretary of the SBC executive committee.

Turkey: crucial crossroads of two continents

ISTANBUL, Turkey (BP) — The 65 million people of Turkey, history's great crossroads of Europe and Asia, hunger and thirst for something. What that something is depends on whom you ask.

Political leaders say Turks want international respect and economic clout.

No — the nation must return to strict Islamic law and unity with the Muslim world, insist religious traditionalists.

On the contrary, warns the military — Progress lies in firm adherence to the secular, mod-

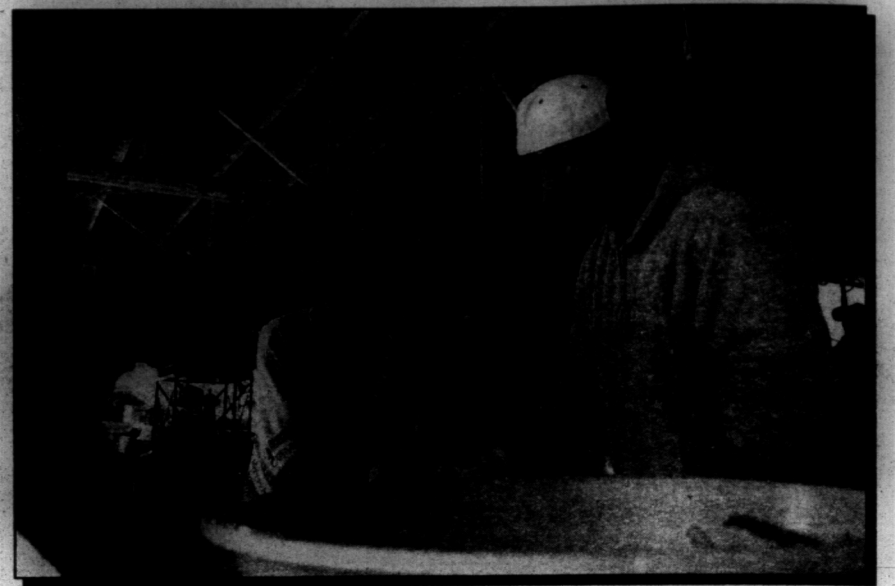
ernizing path established by Kemal Ataturk, founding father of the Turkish nation.

Sprawling Istanbul, population 12 million-plus, embodies Turkey's contradictions. Europe's largest metropolis, it crosses the Bosphorus Strait into Asia and is the only world city straddling two continents.

Thousands of minarets reach like fingers toward heaven alongside countless high-rises and satellite dishes. Muslim calls to prayer compete with the techno-beat blasting out of nightclubs. Auto traffic scurries under ancient Roman aqueducts.

Into this sound and fury comes a voice crying in the wilderness: the tiny Protestant Christian community (estimates range from 1,000-1,500 evangelical believers nationwide). It offers a very different answer to Turkey's hunger and thirst — Jesus Christ.

It's a still, small voice, tentative, often ignored, sometimes intimidated in a land that remains more than 99% Muslim, where people still say that to be Turkish is to be Muslim.



IN SERVICE— Southern Baptist volunteers help cook and clean in an open kitchen at one of the "tent cities" that sprouted after Turkey's massive earthquake last year. The sight of Christian volunteers — Turkish and foreign — loving and serving those hurt by the quake changed the perceptions of many Turkish Muslims. (BP photo)

"Turks haven't rejected the Gospel," claims one Christian. "They haven't heard the Gospel."

Arrests of believers and church closings still occur even in urban areas, despite supposed guarantees of religious freedom.

"I don't like going to church with my family wondering, 'should I take my toothbrush? Will I be spending the night in jail?'" he admits.

"(Turkey) is a place that looks easier than it is," warns

an experienced worker. "There are demons here who knew the apostle Paul, and they know what to do with Christians."

They also know that Turkey is a bridge from Europe to Asia, from West to East, from the past to the future, from the church to the entire Turkic world — 150 million people — that stretches all the way to western China.

God is beginning to beam a great light across that bridge.



MUSLIMS AT WORSHIP — Muslims worship at Istanbul's huge, historic Blue Mosque. Nearby, the ancient Hagia Sophia church — heart of Eastern Christianity for a millennium until 1453 — stands empty, a Muslim museum for tourists. However, the silhouettes of long-gone crosses remain visible on its interior walls. (BP photo)

Christian Turk works to light country's darkness

ISTANBUL, Turkey (BP) — She used to grope in the darkness for something to hold onto. Now Hale Gencil lights candles to illumine the way for others.

A 29-year-old Turkish Christian, she started a small candle-making studio in Istanbul in 1999. She intends to sell her colorful, creatively designed products at home and abroad.

Even more, she intends to hold up a light in the lonely spiritual shadows where she once dwelled.

Many of her friends — young, urban, well-educated, Muslim in name but not practice — still dwell there. They aren't quite sure what to make of Hale nowadays.

"They're looking for truth and can't find it, but they see the peace in here," she says, tapping her heart. "They keep asking me what it is, and I keep saying, I told you: It's Jesus. They don't want to hear that, but they keep calling, asking for prayer."

Smiles come often to Hale's face these days. After a worship service at the young Besiktas Turkish Protestant Church in Istanbul, Hale serves tea and cookies with an easy hospitality and then sits down to talk.

She grew up in a nominally Muslim family, like millions of others in cosmopolitan Istanbul. "You ask them, and they say they believe," she explains, "but they're pretty secular."

So was Hale, who adopted the modernist skepticism fashionable among university students in the city. "In school I judged people according to what they read," she admits.

Her father's death in 1993 devastated Hale, however, and she began to search for a "belief I could hold onto." Buddhism intrigued her but supplied no answers to the basic questions: What is truth? Where is God?

"The Buddhist priests are wise; they can show you what the problem is," she acknowledges, "but without the solution, it doesn't matter how well you know the problem. You have two options: to get really lost or to find the truth."



LIGHTING THE DARKNESS — Turkish believer Hale Gencil makes candles for a living — and is herself a light in the darkness to young Turkish friends searching for truth. Southern Baptists' generous gifts to the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering play an important role in taking the good news of God's love to Turks who have never heard. (BP photo)

In Hale's case, the truth found her — in a dream.

She lived in New York for several years, met some Christians, and considered their beliefs — from a suitable mental distance, of course. One night she dreamed vividly of meeting Jesus Christ and giving Him a wedding garment.

Shocked and in awe, she went to a Christian friend and said, "I have seen your Lord. Tell me about him." The friend directed her to the Bible, which Hale devoured daily while riding the New York subway. She embraced Jesus as Lord.

As she grew in faith, Hale began praying about returning to Turkey to tell others her discovery. Three years later, God said to her, "It's time to go back."

Her commitment to Christ angered Hale's mother, who warned her she would have to choose between Jesus and her family — a wrenching choice many Turkish believers must make.

"I can live without my family," Hale says. "I can't live without (Jesus)."

Mother and daughter eventually reached an uneasy truce; they don't discuss the issue. Meanwhile, Hale has begun making candles and lighting the darkness with the peace that radiates from her.

"I used to pretend to be a powerful woman, but inside I wanted to hold onto something," she reflects. "Now I am a powerful woman, because of (Jesus)."

Editor's note: Hale Gencil and her studio partners have designed special candles to help believers remember to "dispel the darkness" in Turkey through their prayers. Call WMU's WorldCrafts at (800) 968-7301, send e-mail to customerservice@wmu.org, or check their Website, www.wmustore.com/wc/default.asp to order.

'Hidden civilization' difficult to evangelize

SOUTHWEST CHINA (BP) — They're known as a hidden civilization — a people who, by their own choosing, have lived isolated in remote southwest China for centuries, undisturbed by the outside world, forgotten by their national government and untouched by the Gospel.

Their name is derived from a word meaning "barrier." It's a historical reflection of their outlook on the rest of the world.

The 3.1 million Dong (also called Tung) people of China are spread over China's rugged Guizhou and Hunan provinces, and within the Guangxi Zhuangzu Autonomous Region.

Their fear and suspicion of outsiders present one of the most formidable barriers to the Gospel.

Christian mission workers have made attempts to evangelize the Dong. In 1892, a British missionary's plea for help went unanswered. In the 1930s, a small group of German missionaries tried to evangelize the Dong.

Seventy years later, no trace of their labors can be found.

Certainly one reason Christians have made no toehold among the Dong of China is the harsh, remote terrain where they live.



DONG DANCERS — In the village commons of a mountainous Dong village, men and women perform traditional dances, accompanied by handmade bamboo instruments. Christians with a heart for this people group are praying that one day the Dong will celebrate a life of freedom and salvation. (BP photo)

Another barrier is the belief system that keeps their minds and hearts veiled from the truth.

They're held in darkness within a blended religion of Buddhism, pantheism (a belief that laws and spiritual forces are gods), and animism (wherein non-human objects have souls).

ter life. This is my lot," she says.

"Eternal life? It's not even something they would admit they deserve. They are complacent in their misery," she added.

"For some reason, I believe it's the Dong's time," the Southern Baptist worker predicts.

The Dong also practice Tu, a form of black magic.

Further, the Dong have no concept of one supreme God. Their natural response is to simply add to the many deities they already worship, says Terri Ingram (not her real name), a Southern Baptist worker among the Dong.

Everything that happens in the village hinges on the belief and fear of the spirit world. Upsetting the precious balance is one of the worst things a Dong villager can do.

Becoming a Christian definitely upsets the balance, Ingram says.

"There's something in the Dong mindset that says, 'I don't deserve a bet-



YOU CAN RESPOND RIGHT NOW!

Simply share the following prayer with God in your own words:

1. Lord, I admit that I need you. *(I have sinned.)*
2. I want forgiveness for my sins and freedom from eternal death. *(I repent.)*
3. I believe Jesus died and rose from the grave to forgive my sins and to restore my relationship with you. *(I believe in Jesus.)*
4. By faith, I invite Jesus Christ into my life. From this time on, I want to live in a loving relationship with him. *(I receive Christ as my Savior and Lord.)*

But as many as received him, to them he gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in his name (John 1:12).

If you make a decision for Jesus Christ today, contact a local Baptist church for spiritual guidance.

REFLECTIONS ON GRUMPITIS

Several years ago I wrote an article for our church newsletter entitled "Grumpitis." It might be worth thinking about during this post-Thanksgiving period.

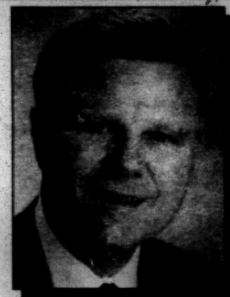
I told in the article that I had done some medical research and found some information on this terrible disease that often affects the saints of God and inflicts pain on the virus carrier as well as those around him or her. I explained how "Grumpitis" does not just target one particular group of folks, but crosses all boundaries infecting male and female, young and old, married and single. It can warp anyone in a hurry.

After writing the article, I found that the response to it was more interesting than the article itself. The Sunday following the article's publication several people commented on how much they appreciated the information.

One lady enthusiastically hugged my neck and thanked me for writing on "Grumpitis." One man came and requested 1,000 copies because he wanted to pass it out to all of his friends. God bless him if he has that many friends that are grumpy.

After reading the article one man came to me and asked, "What happened last week?" I said, "What do you mean, what happened last week?" He replied, "Well, I was just wondering what happened — who said something or who did something that triggered the article you wrote on grumpiness?"

I said, "Oh, nothing." He said,



Directions

Jim Futral, executive director-treasurer
Mississippi Baptist Convention Board

"Yes, somebody must have done or said something." Again I said, "No, really, nobody said anything or did anything. In fact, I don't even remember one grumpy experience last week."

"Well, why did you put that article in there?" was his question. I responded that it just seemed like the right time. I had the material and the opportunity seemed to be appropriate, so I printed it. Disbelieving, he walked away saying, "Sure!"

What I did not tell him was that I had written the article over a year before, probably closer to two years, but had not had the opportunity to use it. At that point I tried to remember if someone had done something or said something that triggered my article on "Grumpitis," but I couldn't remember any particular event.

Now, that incident and the inquiry from the gentleman brings to mind several aspects related to the articles I write in Directions — things which you do not necessarily know, but might be helpful for me to share.

First of all, I do not week to week just throw together a few thoughts and pass them on to The Baptist Record. I generally try to put together something that is meaningful, helpful, and

as best as I can discern, spiritually guided by the Holy Spirit.

That process does not happen in me like popcorn. It takes time, thought, and reflection. Now, if you are a regular reader you would be able to testify that not every article is meaningful to you, but hopefully it is to somebody and hopefully, from time to time, that somebody is you.

The second dimension related to these articles is that they are generally not just expressions of a reactionary moment. The Scriptures say that we are to be quick to hear, and slow to speak, and I take that to heart when it comes to writing these articles. Too many times we tend to reverse the order and are slow to hear and quick to speak.

Concerning the article on "Grumpitis," the fact is that if somebody had been grumpy or griping, it is very doubtful that I would have reacted emotionally to include such a response in an article. I would not particularly want to embarrass the person or unload an emotional outpouring on folks who would have no understanding and not be helped. I want to speak to things that are current, but not just out of an emotional overflow without additional mental process.

A third thought related to the articles that you find here is that there are many other articles that never get printed. It is not unusual for me to write two, three, four, or five articles in a week when I only have space provided for one.

What happens to all those other articles? Well, some of them, like the article on "Grumpitis," sit and patiently wait for a time to be used. Others will probably remain in the eternal archives of unused articles only to gather dust and be unread for decades to come. While you may not appreciate some of the articles I write, you can take some degree of comfort in knowing that there are many that do not get published.

I guess somewhere there will be a great depository where you will find unwritten books, unused articles, unpreached sermons, unfulfilled acts of kindness, untold testimonies, unused talents, unspoken love, unwritten songs, ungiven gifts, unwritten letters, and so forth.

Personally, I hope not to contribute too much to that pile of "Undone Things," but what I want to do, and to the best of my ability will do, is share what I can, while I can, as best I can, in the spirit of Christ.

A final word. I hope you enjoy this glorious time of the year as we celebrate the Thanksgiving Season and rejoice in the coming of our Savior.

While I hope you will stay well physically, even more I hope that your spirit will be protected from the terrible viral infection of "Grumpitis."



Members (pictured) of Paul Truitt Memorial Church, Pearl, recently participated in a church wide mission trip to Darby, Montana. They conducted Backyard Bible Clubs, Vacation Bible School, and revival services.

The music ministry of First Church, Taylorsville, will present a musical, "Christmas Celebration," at 5 p.m., Sunday, Dec. 10, and 7 p.m., Monday, Dec. 11. Frankie Clark is pastor. Allen Hill is minister of music.

West Kemper Church, DeKalb, will celebrate its sesquicentennial anniversary on Sunday, Dec. 3, at 10:30 a.m. A history of the church will be presented.

Thirty-four children participated in "Go Wild for Media," a summer reading program at Ingalls Avenue Church, Pascagoula. The children read a total of 1257 books over 10 weeks. The two top readers were Montana Bates with 128 books read and Dustin Speights with 101 books read. Ninette Speights is library director. John Turner is pastor.

Society Hill Church, Jeff Davis Association, held its first auction on Nov. 11. Items were donated, collected, and logged in for the silent auction. Handmade crafts and homemade cakes and sweets were also auctioned. Gospel music was provided by Joyce and Jerry Evans while the "Kid's Zone" provided entertainment for the children. The church raised \$4,466.25 to pay on the fellowship hall building. Vicky Langston was chairman of the fund raising committee.



Summer reading program participants at Ingalls Ave. Church, Pascagoula

Staff changes

Chris Nash was recently called as part time music director of Pelahatchie Church, Pelahatchie, effective Aug. 30.

Trinity Church, Laurel, called Tom Boone as pastor, effective Dec. 3. A native of Mobile, Ala., Boone received his education at Jones Jr. College and Mobile College. He previously served at First Church, Harrisonburg, La.



GAs of Harrisburg Church, Tupelo, held a mission action project on the weekend of Oct. 21-22. Their goal was to raise money for Camp Garaywa by selling cookies they baked at the church. The girls and leaders began by reading the prayer calendar, Scripture, and praying. GAs took cookies to the adult Sunday School classes and donations were accepted which will enable the GAs to make guest room decorations and use remaining funds for camp. Joy Hubbard is GA director.

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ENON BAPTIST CHURCH, Walthall County, is seeking to fill two part-time staff positions. Persons interested in serving as either minister of music or minister of youth should send resumes to the attention of the applicable search committee and addressed to: Enon Baptist Church, 1451 Hwy. 583 N., Jayess, MS 39641.

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The music ministry of Paul Truitt Memorial Church, Pearl, will present The Christmas Post, a Broadway style musical of faith, Sunday, Dec. 3 at 6 p.m. and Monday, Dec. 4 at 7 p.m. Children's choir leaders are Kaye Thames and Estelle Watts. Pictured (from left, front row) are Randy Herrington, Beth Conn, and Joey Haslob; (back row) Tamara Cumberland, Kayla Conn, Kristin Kennedy, and Jeremy Haslob. Children's choir leaders are Kay Thames and Estelle Watts. Susan Clark is minister of music. Jon Nichols is pastor. For additional information, call (601) 939-2975.

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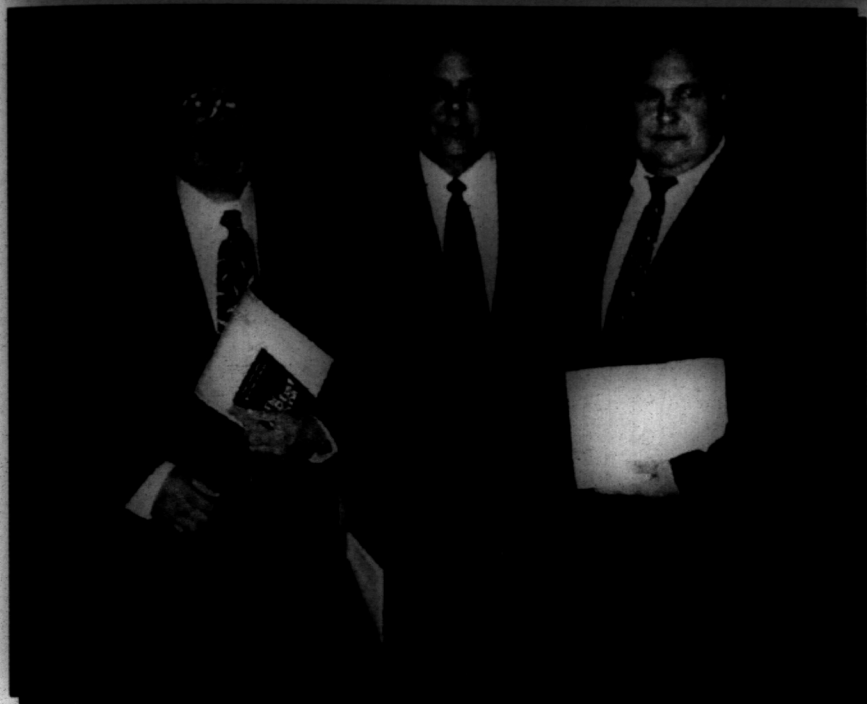
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NAMES IN THE NEWS



Deacons of Highland Church, Natchez

Highland Church, Natchez, held deacon ordination services on Oct. 29. The newly ordained deacons were Mark A. Taylor and Robert Borger. Pictured (from left) are Borger; David McGuffee, pastor; and Taylor.

Daniel Cade Campbell was licensed to the ministry at New Hope Church, Foxworth, on Sunday, Oct. 15. He is pictured with his father and pastor of New Hope Church, Kent Campbell.



Kent and Daniel Cade Campbell

Damascus Church, Flora, held deacon ordination services on Nov. 12. Pictured are Mickey Manning, Junior Whitehead, and Bobby Boyles, elder deacons; Blaine Luke, Bubba McBrain, Leo Bradshaw, Rusty Runnels, and Wayne Whitehead, newly elected deacons; and Sonny Bradshaw, pastor.



Deacons of Damascus Church, Flora

Shady Grove Church, Batesville, held deacon ordination services on Sept. 10 for



Tribble and Douglas

Tim Douglas. Pictured (from left) are Terry Tribble, pastor; and Douglas.

New Hope Church, Foxworth, ordained Eugene Berry and Terry Robertson as deacons on Sunday, Oct. 22. Pictured (from left) are Kent Campbell, pastor; Berry; Robertson; and Sherman Pounds, chairman of deacons.



Campbell, Berry, Robertson, and Pounds

BAPTIST COLLEGE NEWS

William Carey College will celebrate the beginning of the holiday season with a Community Christmas Celebration Dec. 5 at 7 p.m. in the Smith Auditorium of the Thomas Fine Arts Center on the Hattiesburg campus. The Christmas Celebration will feature entertainment for the entire family including the Symphonic Winds under the direction of David Young; the Carey

Carillon under the direction of Kathy Vail; the Carey Guitar Ensemble under the direction of Miroslav Loncar; and the Carey Chorale under the direction of Milfred Valentine. For more information call (601) 582-6175.

The Mississippi College (MC) Chorale, under the direction of James M. Meaders, will present John Rutter's, Magnificat, on Tuesday, Dec. 5,

at 7:30 p.m., in Provine Chapel. The Chorale is an eighty-voice ensemble that includes MC students, faculty, alumni, and members of the community. Dan Fenn, senior organ performance major at MC, is accompanist for the Chorale. Soloists are Lisa Vaughn Strum, senior vocal performance major, and Meghan Jones, senior music education major. For more information please call (601) 925-3440.

Mississippi College (MC) nursing students, in a joint effort of the Department of Education and the State Health Department, are volunteering

for the third straight year to provide free immunizations to sixth graders, whose families want them to participate in the program, in Clinton at Lovett Elementary School. Hepatitis B infections that occur during childhood and adolescence can lead to fatal consequences such as cirrhosis or liver cancer during adulthood. In the first two years of this program, 650 children in Clinton were vaccinated with the Hepatitis B vaccine. This is a 3 shot series. The first is scheduled for Dec. 1, the second for Jan. 26, and the third for April 27. For more information, contact Tina Magers at (601) 925-3278.

Revival results

Revival results from the 2000-2001 season. The revival was held from October 1-4 at the First Baptist Church in Hattiesburg, Mississippi. Over 100 people were baptized and many more were converted to Christ.

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N.C. church taking Gospel across the world

WINSTON-SALEM, N.C. (BP) — Each year, up to 500 members of Calvary Church in Winston-Salem, N.C., staff mission trips that reach across town, across North Carolina, across the Atlantic and Pacific oceans.

The church pays half the expense for each team member, at an average outlay of \$1,000 per person.

Since a heavy majority of Calvary's Sunday School teachers have been on the trips, the mission mandate threaded throughout Scripture gets plenty of attention in their classes.

Pastor Mark Corts, former trustee chairman of the International Mission Board (IMB) of the Southern Baptist Convention, readily and steadily preaches on the mandate.

Lottie, an early Southern Baptist missionary, won a lasting place in missions history by sacrificially giving her life for the people of China, and tirelessly calling on Southern Baptists to send more missionaries.

Today, more than 100 years later, the offering named for her helps support more than 4,900 Southern Baptist missionaries around the world.

Smith carries his "Lottie Moon stick" (the same height as the diminutive, 4-foot 10-inch missionary) with him everywhere — from the time the Christmas offering for international missions begins until the church's goal is met.

Last Christmas, he didn't get too weary. The original goal of \$200,000 was surpassed the first Sunday of December. The final figure: \$397,539.16.

Clearly, missions is not just another program. Rather, it permeates, intertwines and enriches practically everything done in, for, and by Calvary Church.

That is no accident. Early on, Corts grasped the need to make missions a key component of his ministry.

In 1965, "God really laid on my heart the importance of lay evangelism," Corts recounts. "That was an important move to involving members in sharing the Gospel." In 1967, Corts participated in his first overseas missions project in Jamaica.

In the last 18 months, 600-plus people have traveled from Calvary to 14 countries and five states (and across town) in mission projects.

"We go across the aisle, across the street, across the town, across the nations, or across continents because that is where Jesus would go," Smith says. "Through us, that is where Jesus goes."

One striking attribute of Calvary mission teams is the sound missiology they follow.

They strive to empower the overseas Christians they serve and not to create dependence on Calvary to sustain work.

The church recently received a letter from a youngster that read: "I understand Lottie Moon died," he said solemnly. "What I want to know is who is

going to take her place?"

Calvary Church's people are trying to provide some answers to the youngster's question.



LEARNING ENGLISH, GOSPEL — An English as a Second Language class at Calvary Baptist Church in Winston-Salem, N.C., attracts scores of internationals who move into the area. Here, Flossie Pinnix (right) works with a group of Chinese students in a classroom across the hall from Calvary's "Room of Nations," the gathering place for internationals and their American friends. (BP photo by Gibbs Frazier)



DENTAL MISSIONS — Dr. Fred Smith, a volunteer from Calvary Baptist Church in Winston-Salem, N.C., prepares anesthesia for Gabriel Saavedra in a dental clinic typical of outreaches conducted by the congregation at home and around the world. (BP photo)

Missions pastor Francis Smith, former IMB missionary to Chile, coordinates and "inspires" the opportunities.

Each returning team is given a prominent platform to report on the results of their trip.

"I believe and preach that a church should be a whole body for the whole world," Corts explains. "I learned long ago that another key is to expose your people to the field. Let them experience what missionaries do, how they do it and where."

Not surprisingly, Lottie Moon is a very influential and popular figure at Calvary Church.

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Nurses needed at IMB orientation center

ROCKVILLE, Va. (BP) — The International Mission Board's Missionary Learning Center is sending out a desperate plea for registered nurses who are available to volunteer in the center's semi-monthly clinics.

The center, located in Rockville, Va., provides three shot clinics for each group of Southern Baptist missionaries who come through for orientation — thousands of vaccinations a month. By using volunteers to administer the shots — instead of sending missionaries to outside clinics — the International Mission Board saves almost \$300,000 a year.

The need, created by burgeoning numbers of new missionaries, has outstripped the available help.

A minimum of four to six outside volunteers are needed for each clinic, said Pam Parker, a staff nurse at Missionary Learning Center. The vaccinations protect missionaries against serious tropical diseases.

"We have three clinics for every group

[coming in for orientation]," Parker said. "In January alone, we will give 600 to 800 shots [in each clinic]."

Although requests have been issued for more volunteers from Richmond-area churches, Woman's Missionary Union groups and other organizations, response has been slow. Volunteers and medically trained missionaries going through orientation help with the clinic, but more volunteers still are needed.

"It's tough to give 600 shots in an afternoon with so few volunteers," said Travis White, a staff medical consultant for the center. "I believe we're seeing significant signs of burnout."

Some volunteers believe so strongly in the ministry involved with giving shots to missionaries that they go the extra mile to be faithful to the clinics.

Katrina Otto, an emergency room nurse at Providence Medical Center in Kansas City, Kan., has flown in three times to volunteer in the clinics. She takes time off from

work and pays her own way because "I believe in being supportive of our missionaries," said Otto, who is a member of Fellowship Church, Olathe, Kan.

Otto's parents were missionaries to Alaska. Now that she is a nurse, Otto said she wants to use the skills God has given her to help other missionaries.

"It's a way [for people] to use God-given gifts to encourage missionaries as they prepare to go overseas," Otto said.

On her last trip to the Missionary Learning Center, Otto convinced a fellow church member, Joe Thomas, to also volunteer. Thomas took time off from his job at Shawnee Mission Medical Center in Kansas City to help give immunizations.

"If I'm able to do something to help, that's what I do," Thomas said. "I have these opportunities to do it, so I do."

For more information about opportunities to volunteer with the clinics, contact Pam Parker at (804) 219-1893.



TURN AMERICA AROUND

Editor:

Did you ever ride in a wagon to a protracting (revival) meeting or walk along a trail through the woods every night for a two-week meeting to hear that evangelist that we had looked forward for weeks to come to our little country church? I remember Papa would kill a yearling he

had saved for us when the preacher and often his family would have dinner with us. Mama always saved special young fryers for those revival meals as we often had the young folks for a meal on one of those days. Those were special times.

The night I was saved (the last Friday night of September 1925), they sang "Pass me not, O gentle Savior" and "Why do

you wait, dear brother." Often the revival would be set for one week, but things were happening and there was no way that those of that day would let it stop when they knew the Spirit was moving and working.

Friends, it's protracting meeting time. Let the Spirit speak to us in an unusual way. Are you hungry for that? I am.

It will not come easy. Anything worth having is worth working for. It will take a lot of prayer from a lot of people. When Solomon finished praying, Heaven came down. The house was so full of the Holy Ghost that there was not room for the priest to enter. It can happen here in America. There is no other way to turn America around.

History has recorded some great awakenings. It is past time for America to wake up.

Tom Walden
Jackson

GOD'S CHILD

Editor:

Regretfully, The Baptist Record fans the flames of controversy by publishing letters on the New International Version (NIV). James F. Burke noted that the King James Version and NIV are included in LifeWay Adult Sunday School material. "Explore the Bible" series publishes parallel translations. Burke's question about Greek/Hebrew language is more to the point. Significant differences should be editorially explained by persons trained in translation.

Sadly, Harry Thornton's letter is more confusing than accurate. The NIV favors no dialects of the English language, American or British. Only God can judge the inspiration of over 100 translators. They clearly state in the preface that the NIV translation is completely new from the best available Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek texts, with footnotes to explain significant variations from earlier translations.

Perhaps Thornton should have read the NIV translation of 1 Peter 5:8 before he quoted from KJV. It reads: "Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour." When I attempt to interpret God's Word, I ask the Holy Spirit to guide me from the original language, not depending on others' translations. I enjoy the classical Shakespearean language of 1611, but I speak as God's child in 2000.

Ken Gower, pastor
Harmony Church, Cruger

THANKS, MISS. BAPTISTS

Editor:

Thanks, Mississippi Baptists, for affirming the Bible "as our final authority for faith and practice." I pastored four churches in my home state of Mississippi, followed by seven years in Alabama and 32 years with First Church of Slidell, La. where I serve as pastor emeritus today. I am from Monticello.

Hoyte E Nelson
Slidell, La.



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Unsigned letters will not be printed. No multi-copy or form letters will be used.

Each correspondent must include an address and telephone number for verification. In special instances, name may be withheld at writer's request and editor's discretion.

Please include the name of cooperating Mississippi Baptist church where correspondent is a member. (Mississippi Baptists' letters will receive priority when space is limited.)

Letters must be limited to 250 words. All correspondence is subject to editing.

Correspondents should refrain from personal attacks. The opinions expressed in letters to the editor do not necessarily reflect the views of the Mississippi Baptist Convention Board.

No more than one letter from any individual will be printed during a three-month period.

When in the judgement of the editor a given issue has received sufficient attention, correspondence dealing with it will no longer be published and a notice will be printed to that effect.

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Mixtecos present challenge for missionaries

OAXACA, Mexico (BP) — For centuries the Sierra Madre Mountains of southern Mexico have caused transportation and communication difficulties.

The mountains are home to Mixteco (mees-TEH-coh) Indians. Ministry is challenging for anyone who wants to share with them the light of Jesus.

"The mountainous terrain, the isolationism based on local-community loyalties and other factors have splintered the Mixteco language into at least 52 distinct languages," say Milton and Mary Jane Allred, Southern Baptist strategy coordinators for Mixtecos.

Translators say these are not simply dialects, but are truly separate languages.

Mixtecos are the largest unreached people group in Oaxaca (wah-HAH-kah) state. For its size, Oaxaca boasts more ethnic language groups than anywhere in the Americas.

Most Mixtecos are considered Catholics, but actually more practice spirit worship than Catholicism.

Most Mixtecos visit a "curandero" (healer) who uses herbs and medicines both as nat-

ural remedies for healing and to chase away evil spirits who caused the illness.

The syncretism (mix of religions), according to some experts, probably developed because the ancient Mixtecos religious system was similar to the religious system the Spanish brought: creator and mother gods, son, and many spirits (saints).

Mixtecos worship spirits they believe live in caves, rocks, rivers, and the earth. Capable of harming people, the spirits must be appeased with sacrifices.

Mixtecos believe evil spirits are more powerful than the Church. They see Christ left dead on the cross of the crucifix, powerless.

Loyalty to this folk Catholicism inhibits a Mixteco's coming to faith. New believers have been denied water for themselves and their animals, been burned out or driven out of the community without possessions, even been murdered by machetes.

A most hospitable people, the Mixtecos eagerly welcome visitors to their homes, opening doors for Christian friendships.

Jim Wagoner, a agricultural missionary, finds meeting animals' needs opens doors for the gospel.

Milton, a woodworker, stops by construction sites and initiates relationships by showing interest in the jobs.

Through various ministries Christians attempt to share the light of Jesus with those in Satan's dark hold.

One church member teaches adult education to prisoners, using simple Spanish New Testaments as texts. Another church lady serves as a volunteer hospital chaplain.

One Mixteco group the mission team seeks to reach is the Yosondua.

Recently Milton met a Mixteco man who came to Christ in North Baja, California. He has returned home to Yosondua, encouraged by a Baptist pastor in Tijuana to start a church.

Recently a group of translators from one

Mixtec group visited another at Buenavista church. With a guitar, the translators taught Christian songs they had developed in the first group's language.

Milton, a musician, rejoiced at the faces of those Christians singing in a language close to their own.

Since then, the Buenavista pastor has been working with the translators to adjust a booklet containing the Gospel of Mark to fit the Buenavista dialect.

Milton testifies, "We are praising our Lord for His way of putting those two groups together, so the Buenavista congregation can sing to him and read his Word in their heart language."

Many Mixtecos migrate to the U.S. for work. A Southern Baptist missionary couple, the Allreds, seek Great Commission Christians here who will relate to them, since research shows that most Mixtecos who meet Christ will do so outside their home area.

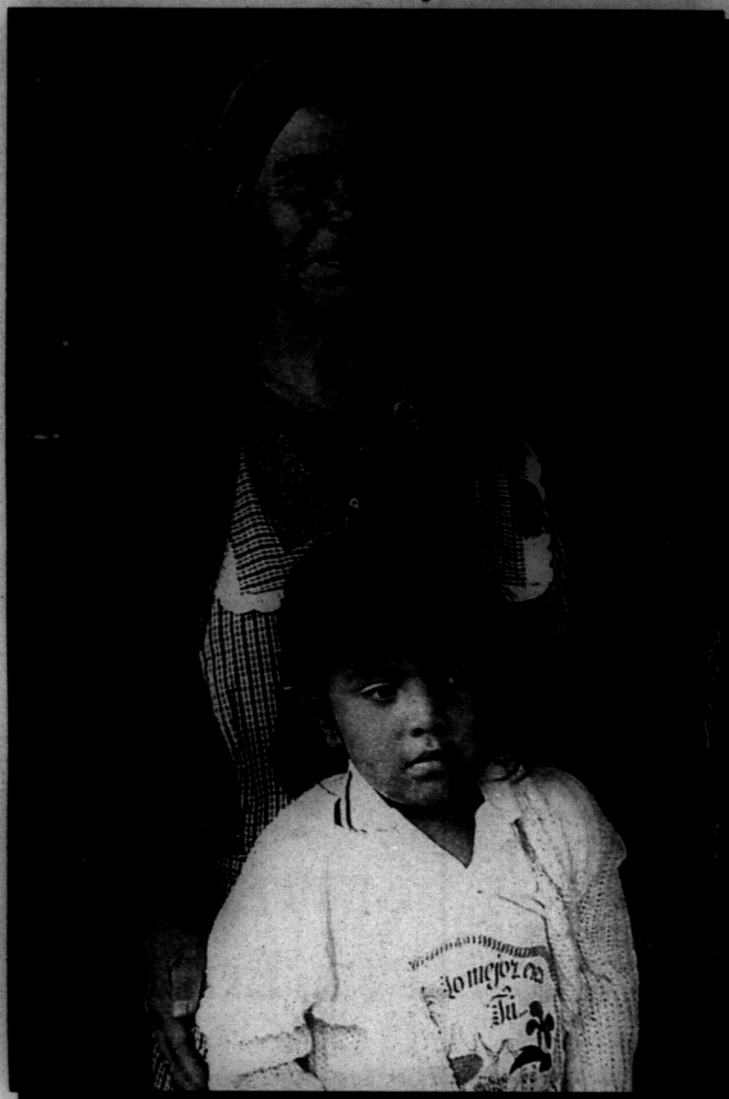
The Allreds are saddened that most of their requests for U.S. Christians to evangelize Mixtecos have yielded no response.

The Allreds received Jorge's name (assumed name) from a Virginia church and went to visit him. Talking over rich cups of coffee, Milton discovered that Jorge was not growing in the Lord back home where traditions were strong.

Jorge revealed he had left a son with a drinking problem in Virginia. Early this year a caring Sunday School teacher contacted the son, Pablo (assumed name).

The son has since called home to say he is attending church with his host family and is sober. Such opportunities abound for Christians to pray for and befriend Mixtecos in the U.S.

"When the Mixtecos come to truly know Jesus Christ, they will see the Light win over the darkness. They will walk in the Light of our Lord," said one Southern Baptist worker.



MIXTECO CHALLENGE —

Ministry is challenging for anyone who wants to share with them the light of Jesus with the Mixteco Indians, who live in the Sierra Madre Mountains of southern Mexico. Mixtecos, the largest unreached people group in Oaxaca state, are considered Catholics, but actually more practice spirit worship than Catholicism. (BP photo)

Missionaries love work among 'beautiful smiles'

PORTO-NOVO, Benin (BP) — "Beautiful smiles. They may be hungry, sick, without a penny in their pockets, but if you smile at them, they'll smile back and greet you warmly."

"Written into the code of their culture is a respect and honor of outsiders, which gives us a tremendous platform from which to share Christ."

"You speak in their language and they'll actually dance around and clap, and can these people worship the Lord!"

"They sing loudly to the many rhythms of their drums, clap yet another, and dance!"

Missionaries Jeff and Barbara Singerman express eloquently their love of the people group with whom they share Jesus — the unreached Ayizo of Benin, West Africa.

Appointed as missionaries to Benin in 1989, the Singermans felt called to move among one of the seven unreached people groups in Benin, the Ayizo.

They prayed for Jeff to receive a specific invitation if God wanted them to go to the Ayizo.

Accompanied by an Ayizo Christian man, Jeff visited eight Ayizo villages. In each they were warmly welcomed.

In one village, Dodji Bata, the people gathered under the

shade of an enormous tree to escape the torrid heat.

Jeff opened to Psalm 1 and exhorted them to walk on God's path.

An ancient, white-haired man, physically hunched with age, with a homemade pipe perched between his rotting teeth, pointed directly, unwaveringly at Jeff and asked, "How can we know how to walk on God's path unless you come back and teach us?"

The Singermans moved to live among the Ayizo, and they feel a deep burden for the people they have met.

"Marissino is a dancer for the python god," Barbara says.

"As a child she was surrendered by her family to the sacred position, to represent the family to the god, to perform the ritualistic sacrifices for the Voodoo priest, and to allow the spirit of the python to come upon her."

"Her hands are rough from working in her husband's pineapple fields."

"Her clothes are a sun-bleached variety of brightly colored African cloths."

"Her hair is twisted into little spikes with black plastic thread, covered with a piece of cloth wound loosely around her head," she said.

Barbara tells Marissino that love comes from Jesus. Marissino is afraid to profess Jesus, believing death might come to her family if she abandons her traditional animistic religion.

Even though Marissino believes Barbara's prayers to Jesus healed her of malaria, she still hovers in the darkness, afraid to accept the Light of the world.

When God called the Singermans to Benin, he used the words of Acts 26:18 to describe their assignment.

"At that time," they recall, "we had no idea of the spiritual darkness of Benin. It is incredible. Idols abound. Some of the idols receive their power from those who were buried alive at their bases."

"Satan worship, although called Voodoo, freely abounds. Goats and chickens are sacrificed to the hunger of the gods."

"There can be no greater spiritual darkness than not even having heard of the One who can set you free from slavery to fear and certain death."

An American ophthalmologist volunteering among the Ayizo discovered many of their retinas were burned, resulting in tunnel vision. "What have you done to your eyes?" he asked them.

"In worship," they explained, "we stand and stare at the sun."

Many Ayizo eagerly embrace Christ. Jeff says, "The only thing you need to do to win the Ayizo to Christ is to walk out your front door!"

Whenever they walk into a village, the Singermans draw a crowd. Prayerwalkers from the US have helped them reach many Ayizo, as have volunteer medical teams.

Earlier this year, 43 churches and preaching points were offering Light to the Ayizo, and 100 people awaited baptism.

In 1999, 145 were baptized — nearly three times as many as three years earlier.

Their language has never been written, but the Ayizo can understand the New Testament in a sister language, Fon.

Barbara has developed a method of teaching literacy using Scripture as a tool. Many are learning to read and the method is spreading among those who work with the Ayizo.

Recently an old man asked Jeff, "We know there is a God. We know he has a plan for our lives. We just don't know who he is."

"Can you help us?"

FAMILY BIBLE STUDY

New beginning

Luke 1:5-9, 11-17, 57-60

By Sharon Neff

Have you ever felt insignificant in God's plan? Have you ever wondered if the things you did to further the Kingdom really mattered? Have you ever wished that God would use you in a really big way to accomplish his purposes?

If we are honest, many of us would have to admit that at some time or another, we've had feelings and questions like this. We might feel that our spiritual gifts are small and that any contributions we make to God's Kingdom are hardly worth mentioning. Yet most of the time we keep trudging along, doing what we can.

Zechariah and Elizabeth could have had similar feelings.

At first glance, Zechariah might seem to have been a prominent man because he was a priest. However, scholars tell us that there were about 20,000 priests at this time, most serving one week, twice a year at the Temple.

Zechariah was considered a "rustic" priest because he did not live in one of the priest-centers of Jerusalem or Jericho and was not "learned" in the Rabbinical sense. Zechariah would be more like a faithful country preacher as compared to the pastor of a big city church.

Elizabeth, while the wife of a priest and a descendant of Aaron, may have felt insignificant and disgraced because she had no children. In a culture



Neff

where barrenness was often seen as a curse from God or judgment for sins, Elizabeth lived "blamelessly" (v. 6) yet without children as she and Zechariah became "well along in years" (v. 7).

Elizabeth and Zechariah, seemingly insignificant Jews, lived a life faithful to God despite their circumstances. They looked with hope toward the redemption he had promised. The important word here is "faithful," for God was about to reward their faithfulness and give them very important roles in his plan of redemption.

Luke tells us that while Zechariah was performing his priestly duties of burning incense in the Holy Place, the angel Gabriel appeared to him and told him that he and Elizabeth would have a son.

Gabriel further stated that his name would be John and he would "go before the Lord, in

the spirit of Elijah to make ready a people prepared for the Lord" (v. 17). This is a reference to the prophet Malachi, who said that before the "day of the Lord" God would send Elijah to prepare the way (Malachi 4:5-6).

God, in his infinite wisdom and graciousness, knew that we humans would need preparation for the arrival of his Son and the redemption he offered.

John's ministry would point to Jesus and get people ready for his coming on the scene. What wonderful news this must have been! Not only a son in their old age, but a son with the mission to prepare the way for the coming of Jesus the Messiah.

Overwhelmed, Zechariah questioned the angel and as a result, lost the ability to speak. Sure enough, Elizabeth became pregnant and gave birth to a son, just as Gabriel foretold.

At the time of the baby's circumcision and naming, Elizabeth said his name should be John. When the puzzled relatives and

neighbors questioned Zechariah, he confirmed the choice by writing, "His name is John" (v. 63) and immediately Zechariah regained the ability to speak.

What did God want from Zechariah and Elizabeth? Their faithful service and availability to be used by him in his time and for his purposes, despite any feelings of insignificance or lack of purpose.

What did God want from John? His faithful obedience and willingness to take a secondary role, to be "second fiddle" if you will, in his great plan of redemption.

What does God want from you and me? Could it be that in the midst of our struggling and doubts, God wants the same thing from us? Could it be that he calls us to simply be faithful, available, and willing to be used in whatever role he sees fit in order to fulfill his plan?

What will your answer be?

Neff is a member of First Church, Greenville.

EXPLORE THE BIBLE

Consistent witnessing

Acts 16:9-15, 25-33

By Lee Yancey

Witnessing is a privilege guaranteed to every Christian. Regardless, of age, sex, or race we are all commissioned to share the good news that Jesus Christ paid the price for our sins and offers us new abundant life in him.

An excellent example of consistent witnessing is found in the life of Paul. On his second missionary journey, Paul received a call to go to Macedonia. His faithfulness to follow God's leadership resulted in the conversions of Lydia, a Philippian jailer, and their households. No matter how difficult the circumstances, Paul was faithful to share the good news.

By studying the example of Paul, we can learn to make the most of every witnessing opportunity in spite of difficulties.

Respond to God's leadership (16:9-10). As Paul and his companions (Silas, Timothy, Luke,

and others) were making their way through Asia Minor, he wanted to preach the Gospel in the province of Asia but was prevented by the Holy Spirit (v. 6). When they came to the border of Mysia, they tried to enter Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus would not permit them (v. 7).

Later Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him to "Come over to Macedonia and help us." Paul and his companions packed immediately, concluding that God had called them to preach in Macedonia. Their faithful obedience resulted in God accomplishing his work in Macedonia.

Just as the missionary team urgently prepared to go to Macedonia once Paul received the vision, believers today should respond immediately when God presents a witnessing opportunity.

Respond to personal invitation (16:11-15). Setting sail from



Yancey

Troas, the missionary team traveled to Philippi via Samothrace and Neapolis. After sailing two or three days, the team stayed several days in Philippi, a Roman colony and the leading city of that area of Macedonia (northern Greece today).

On the Sabbath, they went outside the city to find a place of prayer. The city of Philippi prohibited unrecognized religions so the Jews had to meet outside the city. Several women were gathered for prayer and Paul began to tell them about Jesus. One of the women, Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth from the city of Thyatira, believed in the Lord as a result of their message.

Even as Paul issued an invitation for Lydia and her friends to accept Christ, Lydia issued an invitation for Paul and his companions to make her home a gathering place for believers. This is the first incident in Acts where a household was baptized. Only those who received the Gospel were baptized, exclusive of infants who were not yet ready. Even as Paul witnessed to the women outside Philippi, we are to witness as

we develop new relationships with others.

Respond in a crisis (16:25-33). Paul was a pro when it came to making the best of a bad situation. After being stripped, beaten, and severely flogged, Paul and Silas were thrown into prison for their religious teaching in Philippi.

The straw that broke the camel's back was when Paul commanded an evil spirit to come out of a girl who had been following and harassing them. Several men had been using the girl's fortune-telling ability to make money and once they realized she could no longer tell the future, they became incensed with Paul and Silas.

So it was that Paul and Silas were beaten and thrown in jail in an inner cell with their feet in stocks. About midnight, the duo began singing hymns to God while the other prisoners listened intently to the concert.

Suddenly, there was a violent earthquake. The foundations of the prison were shaken, all the doors were thrown open, and all the chains became loose. With all the commotion, the jailer woke up and seeing the prison doors open determined to kill himself.

In the nick of time, Paul

assured the jailer that all prisoners were present and accounted for and that taking his life was unnecessary. The jailer, visibly shaken, fell before Paul and Silas and asked, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"

Whether his question was a physical or spiritual one we don't know. However we do know that Paul gave him a spiritual answer: "Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved — you and your household."

This statement in verse 31 is the most simple yet profound response that can be given to those seeking salvation. Evidence of the jailer's conversion is found in the following verses. The jailer took them and washed their wounds and then he and his family were baptized.

He then brought them to his own house and set a meal before them. He was filled with joy because he had come to believe in God — he and his whole family (v. 34).

As Paul and Silas witnessed consistently and expressed their joy by singing hymns in prison, we can witness despite our circumstances.

Yancey is consultant for the Mississippi Baptist Christian Action Commission.

Guidelines for submitting news and photographs

The Baptist Record is pleased to publish news and photographs of special events that take place in cooperating churches of the Mississippi Baptist Convention.

News submitted for publication in The Baptist Record must be either (a) typewritten, (b) neatly printed on 8 1/2 by 11-inch paper, or (c) neatly printed on standardized forms provided by the newspaper. All articles must be received in writing; no articles will be accepted over the telephone.

News may be submitted electronically to the address below, and must be contained in the message segment of an e-mail form. Due to increasing virus threats,

no text attachments will be accepted. Photograph attachments are permissible.

Please make articles concise. Include the who, what, when, where details of the event. Do not include personal stories or opinions.

Photographs may be color or black and white. Photos and digital printouts are acceptable. Digital photos may be submitted as a JPEG file via e-mail, or (b) three-and-a-half inch printouts, or (c) CD. Photos must be clear, sharp, and well-lighted.

Submit articles and photos to: The Baptist Record, P.O. Box 100, Greenville, SC 29602. E-mail: news@baptistrecord.com

Missionaries seeking to reach Isaan people

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IKVE ALU FDLLR; ECSM
CPXE SOSUM YKX CVH
FULECSU IVEC K XSE.

YVTKC HSOSX: EIL

Clue: Y = M

Have fun with cryptography and exercise your Bible knowledge. A King James Version Bible verse has been encoded by letter substitution. The same letter is substituted throughout the puzzle. Solve by trial and error. Answer to last week's puzzle: Daniel Six: Four.

BANGKOK, Thailand (BP) — Singing. Laughter. Jokes as they work. The most hilarious revelers during the Thai New Year celebration. Poverty. Constantly moving to find work. Despair. Hard, monotonous jobs.

These two extremes reflect one people: the 20 million Isaan of northeastern Thailand, a people group lost in spiritual darkness.

Monks chant repeatedly at Isaan funerals: "There is no hope, only suffering ... Dead, never to arise."

However, four Southern Baptist missionary couples and a few nationals are working to bring the light of Jesus to the Isaan.

Buddhism teaches the Isaan that good works and countless reincarnations will release them from this world's suffering, says missionary Mark Caldwell.

Animism leads them to make offerings to spirits for protection from evil or in gratitude for blessing.

The Isaan region is the poorest in Thailand. Historically, the Isaan are poor rice farmers, but in the last two decades many have migrated to Bangkok and other cities for work.

The migration of Isaan youth means many are absorbed into the vices of the city. Desperate at not finding work and failing to meet their parents' expectations, they are vulnerable.

The Caldwells and their missionary colleagues attempt to



BRINGING LIGHT — Four Southern Baptist missionary couples and a few nationals work to bring the light of Jesus to 20 million Isaan of northeastern Thailand. Traditionally the Isaan response to the gospel has been very slow. Fewer than 1% claim to be Christian. (BP photo)

help meet employment needs through a ministry known as Thai Country Trim.

Local handcrafts made by village women are sold overseas. The ministry provides income and an opportunity for the women to hear the gospel from co-workers.

Mobile medical clinics provide opportunities to meet local government authorities, police, and citizens. Always the good

news of Jesus is shared with patients.

AIDS victims typically are cut off from family and friends, so ministry to them is especially meaningful.

"When they not only see that Christians don't fear them, but rather reach out in love and concern to them in some small, but tangible ways, many have become interested in this Jesus who makes Christians different

and have asked Jesus to change their lives as well," Caldwell reports.

Helen Caldwell describes Phun, a typical 30-something Isaan man with a wife, children, and a decent job. Though he loved his family, he had visited prostitutes — an Isaan custom.

Then the dreaded news came. He is HIV positive. Phun's family, employers, and village deserted him.

He moved into a Buddhist home for AIDS victims and became deeply depressed.

A believer persistently visited Phun in his tiny, stifling room, which he rarely left. As he got weaker and sicker, she offered to help, and he let her feed him a dessert.

"Aren't you afraid of getting AIDS, feeding me like this?" he asked. "Oh, Phun, I am not worried about getting AIDS," she replied, "but I am worried that you will never have a chance to know Jesus and his love for you."

Phun confessed his desire to be God's child and the believer joyfully led him to Christ. No longer alone, he was part of the family of God.

Traditionally, the Isaan response to the Gospel has been very slow. Fewer than one percent claim to be Christian. Bible portions have been translated into Isaan, as well as a few songs and teaching materials.

The "Jesus" film is not available in the Isaan language.

Ministry to Jews is mission of American woman

RICHMOND, Va. (BP) — She knows about the Northern Lights from her American roots in a far northern state. More importantly, she knows Jesus, whom God sent as Light of the world.

Ruth Johnson (not her real name) left the great north to live in the great south — around the equator and below. Her motive is clear: she wants Jews there to know their promised Messiah has come, and his name is Jesus.

Growing up, Ruth knew no Jews. In college, she read novels based on Jewish history. God began shining his light into her life regarding Jews. Ruth read more.

She met others interested in Jewish people and Israel. While touring Israel, she discovered a deep love for Jewish people.

She moved there as a Christian volunteer and studied Hebrew. Returning to the U.S., she prepared for appointment as a missionary, eventually moving halfway around the world to point Jews to the Light.

Many Jews are secularists. They see humans as basically good, able to reach heaven by good works. Material wealth is their focus.

Many don't believe in God; many think he simply is an abstract force. Continuity of cultural heritage supersedes faith in God.

Jews generally expect to marry Jews and have children.

"If we remember that two-thirds of the Jews of Europe were destroyed in the Holocaust then we can understand why it is important for Jews to marry and have children," Ruth says. "It is important to these Jews to not marry outside their faith."

Ruth sees wide variance in the ways Jews keep religious laws. Many Jews do not relate to Judaism as a religion but feel a strong identity with their Jewish heritage.

"For others, if you take religion out of Judaism you really have nothing left at all," Ruth explains. "I have heard over and over again that according to Judaism what you believe is not nearly as important as what you do."

"In other words, a person can believe that the world is created by aliens and worship Mother Earth but keep the Sabbath and dietary laws and still be considered a good Jew."

However, she points to one exception: "(When) a Jew comes to believe that Jesus is the Messiah."

Ruth makes Jewish friends for Jesus in various ways — attending synagogue, participating in Jewish organizations, taking a Hebrew class.

One year she took a tour which enabled her to meet several Jewish people.

Returning home, she maintained contact with fellow travelers and met other Jews through them.

She finds Jews to be suspicious, fearful, and incorrectly taught about Christianity. She patiently shows interest and "respect for them as the older brother that Judaism is to us."

Abe (not his real name) is an Orthodox Jew whom Ruth approached about developing a project with her. She was surprised to learn that he was not rigid about Jewish beliefs.

They scheduled discussions which Abe had to cancel due to injuries from an accident.

When they did meet, Ruth told Abe she had asked her prayer chain to pray for his recovery. He smiled hugely and thanked her.

"I could see that really meant a lot to him. I am not sure what God is doing in Abe's life but I do believe he is at work."

Ruth prays fervently for Jews to know Jesus.

"The Jewish people are firmly convinced that if they faithfully keep all of the commandments of the Torah then they will get to heaven," Ruth explains.

"What they fail to recognize is that the only One who can perfectly keep the Torah is Jesus."

"Without the atoning blood of Jesus all of their good deeds will not be of any eternal value whatsoever."

"My goal is to help Jews to come to a recognition of Jesus as the Messiah and to worship him in a Jewish context," she said.



REACHING JEWS — God put a love for Jewish people in one Southern Baptist woman's heart, and she moved halfway around the world to share with them the Good News. (BP photo)